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ABSTRACT

Research offers educators information on the skills that will be needed by office employees as new technologies are introduced into the workplace. Surveys and studies sponsored by private organizations as well as private businesses indicate that employers still require secretaries to have a solid foundation in the more traditional secretarial skills. They are increasingly, however, looking for employees with good employability skills and some experience in automated office equipment. Some employers prefer employees with good communication and decision-making skills and offer word processing training after employment. Findings seem to indicate employees must be trained to master the new concepts of the office as well as to operate new equipment in the office. Training in word processing concepts and skills, either in the classroom or on the job, increases an employee's effectiveness on the job. (YLB)

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THE EFFECT OF WORD PROCESSING CONCEPTS AND SKILLS ON ENTRY LEVEL JOB PERFORMANCE

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by

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The decade of the 70's offered a great technological development to the traditional office; an office that had the secretary performing all of the duties in the office. A new system for processing words was created to increase the productivity of the secretary. The new system, Word Processing, split the secretarial duties into two areas, typing and nontyping. In the 1970's and 1980's word processing became the major method of processing information. More and more companies began incorporating the new office system.

The transition from the traditional office to the new office system where the use of computers will increasingly perform the routine tasks of the office, will require workers to be trained to succeed in the work force. There is a need for skills in word processing, equipment operations and communications. Educators will be held accountable for preparing workers with the necessary skills.

The U. S. Department of Labor forecast's the secretarial field as one of ten occupations expected to have the biggest growth in the number of jobs by 1995. Because of this prediction it is imperative that the word processing employer, teacher, and student know whether prior word processing instruction will aid the new employee in entry-level job performance.

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With the introduction of personal computers and such services as electronic mail, technical skills required of secretaries are shifting from shorthand, typewriting skills and the operation of ba sic office equipment to such areas as: Knowledge of data/word processing; proficiency in operation of personal computers including the use of spreadsheets, data base management, and graphics software; telecommunications including facsimile and electronic mail; and the integration of graphics with other software packages.

According to the 1985 Newspaper Help Wanted Advertisements Survey, sponsored by the Professional Secretaries International Research and Educational Foundation, 30.3 percent of secretarial ads required word processing/computer skills or the desire to learn them, while virtually all of the ads indicated that typing would be required on the job. Employers are still very much concerned that secretaries have a solid foundation in the more traditional secretarial skills but are increasingly looking to hire secretaries with experience in automated office equipment (Goldstein 1985).

The LMIN (1980-81) study concluded word processing trainees will continue to be selected on the basis of their performance on the job, in terms of their of intelligence, English skills, reliability, "positive work attitude" including good attendance, patience, and what is defined in this context as "mechanical ability." An exposure to the principles of word processing, rather than to the more mechanical operator skills, might be justified at the pre-employment level, but only for the most accomplished students. The rationale would be that such students, about a year or more after initial hiring, may be offered

an opportunity to learn word processing. In that case, some familiarity with the principles could be of help to them. Those students who, although employable are only minimally competent, are unlikely to be offered word processing training in either the private or the public sector. It is not possible to justify such pre-employment training for them.

Matherly (1986) in her article about new techniques being implemented in the office and as the new technology is being introduced the more routine tasks will be handled by electronic equipment instead of by people. Their jobs will involve mastering new equipment as well as utilizing skills that cannot be readily automated. Students should be taught the skills that would be useful in this area. These skills in clude: 1) Decision-making and problem solving skills, 2) Organizational skills, 3) Human relations skills, 4) General communication skills, 5) Oral communication skills, 6) Interpersonal communication skills, 7) Meta-communication skills, 8) Nonverbal communication skills, 9) Written communication skills, and 10) Listening skills. These less technical skills are needed along with the basic skills of typing.

Stites (1985) in her study, "Employability Competencies for Entry Level Word Processing Skills", reports needed competencies for word processing are in the areas of systems operation, word processing center procedures, word processing theory, and proofreading skills.

A Delphi study (Erickson & Asselin, 1986) conducted to identify and prioritize competencies needed for clerical personnel who will be working in the automated office of the future concluded that the competencies be categorized into four areas: 1) High-Priority/High-Consensus which come from the language and communication group. Such

skills as Language and Communication; Attitudes and Personal Traits; Management Skills; Numerical and Record Keeping and Concepts and Processes. 2) High Priority/Low -Consensus which include Correction of the French grammar in various documents, use of effective oral communication, process telephone calls, develop a filing system for administrative documents, and demonstrate punctuality. 3) Low-Priority/High-Consensus which include less importance for clerical personnel to compose or write reports, translate from French to English, use graphic software, operate videodisk systems, type documents from dictation equipment, type at a speed of at least fifty words per minute, supervise clerical personnel, delegate responsibilities, make travel reservations, use electronic spread sheets or other accounting systems, and enter administrative data into the computer. 4) Low-Priority/Low-Consensus which includes taking notes quickly and effectively; translating from English to French; using shorthand; and operating electronic calculators, copy/duplicating machines, optical character recognition systems, and microfilm equipment.

Miller Brewing Company, decided to automate its clerical services in its regional offices, early in 1985. Miller linked itself with Manpower´s special project team and its software program called SKILLWARE. The program was designed to teach clerical workers with little or no experience (Fernberg, 1985).

The 1984-85 version of the Occupational Outlook Handbook predicts that the employment prospects for business education graduates are:

> ("secretaries" and stenographers") Employment of secretaries is expected to increase about as fast as the average for all occupations. . .[but] an exceptionally large number of jobs will be available through the mid-1990´s (p. 211).

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (1985) reports that a list of 40 occupations with the largest projected job growth during the 1982-1995 period, "secretaries" ranked #3 (29.5 percent increase); "general clerks, office" ranked #4 (29.6) percent increase); "clerical supervisors ranked #35 (15.7 percent increase). Indicating that the demand for clerical workers is excellent.

The kind of business graduates employers are looking for; as explained in the Occupational Outlook Handbook (1985) are: Employers prefer high school graduates for clerical jobs. They look for people who understand what they read, know basic spelling and grammar, and can use arithmetic...continuing advances in office automation have increased the demand for clerical workers who are versatile enough to learn new technologies...(p.202) It can be said that applicants for clerical type jobs possess both (a) the basic academic skills and (b) the abililty to profit from on-the-job upgrading of their skills.

A statistics publication of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (1985) reported:

- Of the 25 occupations with the largest numbers of workers who utillized training obtained in school programs, "secretaries" ranked #1 with 2,224,000 persons
- Of the 25 occupations with the largest numbers of workers who utilized high school vocational education programs, "secretaries´ ranked #1 with 1,323,000 persons representing 28.2 percent of all workers who utilized high school vocational education in their jobs.
- Of the 25 occupations with the largest numbers of workers utilizing private posthigh school vocational training, "secretaries´ ranked #2 with 231,000 persons.
- Of the 25 occupations with the largest numbers of workers utilizing junior college or technical training. "secretaries" ranked #1 with 530,000 persons.

Dennee (1981) in her research to collect data on important word

processing competencies necessary so that educators can make rational decisions about curriculum content found significant differences between instructors and supervisors, correspondence secretaries, and administrative secretaries when rating word processing competencies. The instructors consistently indicated a higher importance and frequency for the competencies than the supervisors, and secretaries.

Grannis' (1982) study was to identify the entry-level word processing skills needed for employment in southwestern Michigan businesses. The results showed that employers wanted office employees who are able to perform a variety of typewriting tasks with average speed and accuracy. The employee also needed a strong English background, word processing theory and concept, and hands-on-equipment training.

Price (1983) in testing her hypotheses to determine the opinions of business teacher educators, two-year post-secondary secretarial and office carrers instructors, automated/electronic office consultants, office equipment manufacturers, and office supervisory personnel concerning the skills and knowledges needed by office workers in the electronic office in the 1980's and the 1990's with implications for business education curricula found that there were no differences between or within the educator and non-educator groups for the 1980's and /or the 1990's. However, considerable differences were found between and within the groups for most of the hypotheses. The greatest differences were predicted for the categories of word processing, shorthand, data processing.

Wilson (1984) conducted a study to determine if the competencies possessed by entry-level secretaries trained in postsecondary schools

are the competencies that employers seek in hiring secretaries for today´s office found that Teachers, secretaries and employers perceived Basic Knowledges and skills to be the most important skill area for entry-level secretaries. The teachers perceived the secretaries to be best prepared in this area. However, the employers perceived Personal Characteristics to be the skill area on which entry-level secretaries are best prepared.

Barton (1985) in her study to determine competencies, locus of training and job qualifications in Ohio concerning the entry level/post entry-level skills needed for the Correspondence Secretary, and Word Processing Supervisors, concluded of the 50 competencies used, the study found a significant difference at the .05 level among the perceptions of the three groups for 18 competencies relative to entry-level and postentry-level skills, for 12 competencies relative to the actual locus of training, and for 25 competencies relative to the preferred locus of training. A typewriting test and a language skills test were the job qualifications most frequently used by companies to hire correspondence secretaries. The majority of all the groups named company training as the most common single locust of training for entry-level word processing skills.

In summary, it can be said that with the introduction of new technologies into the workplace changes must be made to equip the employee to handle these changes. Employees must be trained to master the new concepts of the office as well as to operate new equipment in the office. Training in word processing concepts and skills, whether it be in a classroom setting or on the job, increases an employee´s (new or experienced) effectiveness on the job.

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